

Burke County Natural Areas Inventory

LINVILLE GORGE Significant Natural Heritage Area

Site Significance: National
Quadrangle: Linville Falls

Size: 10,315 acres
Ownership: United States of America

SIGNIFICANT FEATURES: The site is significant for one of the largest expanses of old-growth forest in the state, as a National Wilderness Area, and as habitat for 26 rare species. It contains a cluster of 20 rare vascular and nonvascular plant species, including most of the world's mountain golden-heather (*Hudsonia montana*), a State Endangered and Federally Threatened species and substantial populations of the State and Federally Threatened Heller's blazing star (*Liatris helleri*). Also present are the State Candidate/Federal Species of Concern plant species sweet pinesap (*Monotropsis odorata*) and the liverwort *Plagiochila sullivantii* var. *spinigera*, as well as 12 State Candidate plant species: Greenland sandwort (*Minuartia groenlandica*), ash-leaved golden-banner (*Thermopsis fraxinifolia*), large witch-alder (*Fothergilla major*), roundleaf serviceberry (*Amelanchier sanguinea*), deerhair bulrush (*Trichophorum cespitosum*), pinebarren death-camas (*Zigadenus leimanthoides*), simple peatmoss (*Sphagnum pylaesii*), the liverwort *Plagiochila sullivantii* var. *sullivantii*, the liverwort *Drepanolejeunea appalachiana*, the liverwort *Cephalozia macrostachya* ssp. *australis*, the liverwort *Chiloscyphus muricatus* and the liverwort *Chiloscyphus appalachianus*. Also of significance is the presence of the Significantly Rare wall-rue (*Asplenium ruta-muraria*), known in the state from only six small populations.

It also contains a cluster of six rare animal species, including the Special Concern/Federal Species of Concern Allegheny woodrat (*Neotoma magister*), the Federally Endangered peregrine falcon (*Falco peregrinus*), the Federal Species of Concern Southern Appalachian red crossbill (*Loxia curvirostra*), and the Special Concern black vulture (*Coragyps atratus*).

The site contains one of the largest areas of old-growth forest in North Carolina, including examples of Canada Hemlock Forest and the uncommon Carolina Hemlock Bluff communities. Excellent examples of the rare High Elevation Rocky Summit and Upland Pool community types, are present as well as other uncommon rock outcrop types. The site is notable for its outstanding geologic features.

Linville Gorge forms the primary component of the Linville Gorge Macrosite and it protects most of the Linville River Aquatic Habitat.

LANDSCAPE RELATIONSHIPS: The Linville Falls site is contiguous with the gorge on the north. Most of the Linville River Aquatic Habitat is contained within Linville Gorge. The Duggers Creek Forests site lies about one-half mile north of the northern boundary of this site. Linville Gorge is located entirely within Pisgah National Forest. Habitats required by several of the rare species of Linville Gorge do not exist elsewhere in the nearby landscape.